Mr. Phil Donahue(staff)
NBC-TV
New York, N.Y. 10012

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
10/18/89

Dear Phil,

Remember those shows I used to do with you when you were at WHIO? All those we ad libbed when a guest didn't show?

I begin this way because I presume you get too much mail to read it all and to let your staff know that years ago we knew each other. The last show we did was one of your first on TV, when you originated in Dayton. What a blizzard you got me into when you asked me to go to Indianapolis to do a show on a sister station!

I caught part of your show this morning, after it was well started, and didn't see the end because it was pre-empted for an earthquake report. And I've not read the Abernathy book but I've more or less kept up with the controversy. If I correctly understood one of your guests, he said that the tape sent to the King family was made on a mike placed under Dr. King's bed at the Willard Hotel in Washington. Not so. It was a composite made in the FBI's lab.

So you can understand the documents I enclose, Congress amended the Freedom of Information Act's investigatory files exemption over one of my earlier FOIA lawsuits. I then filed a number of information requests, including relating to Dr. King and his assassination. I also filed a number of appeals relating to what was withheld by the FBI. The copy of the poor carbon is an appeal relating to the withholding of FBI names. I enclose it for the portion that relates to the sending of that tape to the King family. By the way, the former FBI agent, Lish Whitson, as of my last knowledge was practising law in Washington and had not been subjected to any harassment over what he did.

Also enclosed is a page from the internal investigation of how the FBI abused Dr. King. It identifies Whitson and indicates the fabrication of the composite tape and has a few other details.

The third record is an FBI expurgated version of the letter intended to get Dr. King to kill himself.

Please excuse my also sending a copy of a letter I wrote yesterday to a columnist who's name I've removed. Your staff may want to brief you on some of its additional content. I'm 76 now and in impaired health. Among my reasons is indicating the reason I have for questioning Abernathy's version of that last night.

Best wishes,

Harold

Harold Weisberg

Mr. William Raspberry
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
10/18/89

Dear Mr. Raspberry,

You may not remember it but Paul Valentine introduced us years ago. I write to thank you for your today's column and perhaps add to your knowledge of what seems likely to be an ongoing controversy. I've not read the Abernathy book and probably won't buy it but I did catch his joint appearance on part of today's Phil Donahue show, with Ben Hooks and others. It appears that there are other factual errors in the Abernathy account of Dr. King's last night. Please also excuse my sending you a copy of the letter I wrote Mrs. Gilliam yesterday but I'm not well and am limited in how much I can do. I hope she won't mind and I'm sending her a copy of this and its enclosures so she'll know.

I've made extensive use of the Freedom of Information Act to obtain records relating to the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. King. In the King lawsuit, which had not yet reached its end although filed in 1975 (the remaining issue being only counsel fees) I got what the FBI refers to as its Murkin file. It is these records I refer to in the letter to Mrs. Gilliam in which I express doubts about Dr. Abernathy's accuracy about that last night. The copy of the rather poor carbon is a page from innumerable appeals that, at the request of the judge in that case, I made as informative as I could to the then appeals officer, Quin Shea. This one was never acted on. His hands were pretty much tied and they eventually eased him out.

To the best of my knowledge it has never been published that the man who did that mailing of the letter intended to get Dr. King to kill himself was a practising lawyer in Washington, Lish Whitson. The page that identifies him is from the so-called OPR internal investigation of how the FBI treated Dr. King. I wrote the identification of "Murphy Report (CRD) 3/31/76)" on the bottom to identify it for archival purposes. On today's Donahue Show one of the panel said that Dr. Abernathy said the tape was made via a mike under Dr. King's bed at the Willard Hotel. In fact it was a composite made by the FBI lab. Whitson flew to Tampa, where he mailed them, the tape and the letter.

I also enclose the letter as it was disclosed to me by the FBI. The expurgations are the FBI's.

In indicating to Mrs. Gilliam what I have and its availability I forgot to tell her what I have that to a degree substitutes for an index. The FBI used to call them "abstracts." They made two copies, 3x5, one filed chronologically and one by serial number of the record. They were made for headquarters copies of records only but to a fair degree can be used to locate the reports relating to Dr. King's activities the night before he was killed.

I share your disgust and disappointment and thank you again for this column.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

Mrs. Dorothy Gilliam
The Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

10/17/89

Dear Mrs. Gilliam,

What you say in your "Unheroic Allegations" column needed saying so much!

Another aspect I'll get to also troubles me.

You may not remember my name but during the years I sought independence and honesty in farming you were a customer. I was in the Post's newsroom Wednesday afternoon.

Before then I was a reporter, Senate investigator and editor and wartime intelligence analyst. After my farming was wrecked by low-flying military helicopters I returned to writing and investigating, with six books on the assassination of President Kennedy and one on that of Dr. King. They're all stood time's testing. I was the investigator who did the work that got James Earl Ray an evidentiary hearing. It was to determine whether or not he'd get a trial. I did the investigating for the hearing also. Paul Valentine covered it and I'm sure he'll tell you that we exculpated Ray - which means the crime is not solved. The liberal judge held, ultimately - it took more than a year to get him to get the transcripts prepared - that guilt or innocence were immaterial.

After beginning a second book on the King assassination FOIA was amended, rather its investigative files exemption was amended, over one of my earlier FOIA lawsuits. I then sought to use it to compel the FBI to disclose all. In this I failed but I did get about 60,000 pages. Among other things these include headquarters and field office records, beginning with those of Memphis. Included are the files on the group of young Memphis blacks who took the name "Invaders" and of the sanitation workers' strike.

Failing health has kept me from completing this book and perhaps my recollections of all those records may not be as clear as it could be but it is my recollection that the FBI was looking diligently for the kind of thing Abernathy exploits and could not find it. They did have the Lorraine Motel and King's party pretty well covered, as did the local police, who did most of it.

I do not recall any reference to the dinner party after the "Mountaintop" speech but I do recall that Dr. King did almost no sleeping and was concerned about the hearing for the day he was killed, on the injunction. The FBI's reports refer to meeting after meeting in room after room. My only recollection of two women is of two white women from, as I recall, Louisville, wealthier women with a Cadillac. They went to Memphis with Dr. King's brother and from Memphis went to Florida, on vacation. Where the FBI also covered them and reported on them. I am sure that if the FBI got even an unconfirmed rumor relating to Dr. King's personal life it would have reported it. They all knew Hoover was looking for just that.

Dr. King was too tired to speak the night before he was killed. He sent Abernathy in his place. But the gathering would not accept Abernathy as a substitute and he had to call Dr. King and tell him this. (At least two FBI agents covered that speech and their other records - that was a day in which they never expected any devil loving scripture to be able to - have them referring to mature blacks as "boys" and even "monkey-faced.")

This is to suggest that to the very end Abernathy was second fiddle and may not have liked that a bit.

Bearing on how dependable his recollections are, he insisted from the first that Dr. King died in his arms and spoke with him, the first not true and the second not possible. So, I have your questions about his motives and my own about his dependability.

All of my materials, about 60 file cabinets of records and countless boxes of them, will be a permanent public archive at local Hood College. They've made copies of the Invaders and sanitation-strike files and use them. One white woman student made a year-long study of them and did a fine thesis. History Professor Dr. Gerald McKnight has done two understated scholarly articles for The South Atlantic Quarterly (Duke). He is also getting and plans a book on the FBI's files on the Poor Peoples' Campaign. I've already given Hood records - know I'll not be able to make any use of, like the CIA's on its mind-bending adventures. But I've kept the King files because if I can get help I'd like to try to return to that book and because I can make them available to others. To date no black has had any interest and no good TV uses have been made of them, although BBC just did a program that supposedly includes what they wanted of them. (I've not seen it but I'm sure they went for one of the untenable conspiracy theories.)

So, if you know any students or others who want to do research, all of this is available, with no strings and no charge, here or at Hood.

Come to think of it, I finally persuaded what was then University Publications of America to make them available on microfilm. Dave Garrow had discouraged their interest. They are at 44 N. Market St., here in Frederick. But they did not copy what the FBI called "abstracts" that I did, with some difficulty, get. They are brief summaries of each headquarters record. There is no available index.

When I was working on my book, "Frameup", I tried to interest SCLC, entirely without success in Atlanta and with limited success in New York. Abernathy was not alone in being no Blondel. I suppose I was only another white honkie in Memphis and only one black reporter, Les Payne, ever had any interest. Aside from Flo Kennedy, who got me some kind of an award for it, I recall no other black interest.

If you ever know of anyone who may be interested in making a study of the two files Hood has copies of, about a file drawer in extent, my arrangement with them is that anyone can get copies. I don't know what facilities they have for this but copies can be made commercially in Frederick for five cents, perhaps less in quantity. Students and others have unsupervised access here, of course. These two files would make a fine thesis in history, political science, pre-law and law studies.

By the way, as soon as I heard Abernathy on radio - phoned the Post's national desk to say that I recalled no such thing from the FBI's files I have and there was no interest. I was told it was a Style story and they'd all gone for the day.

One other thing that may interest you or a student: Bull Connor had an earlier and ignored history. I was the editor of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee in the late 1930s. We investigated him and as I recall his then employer, U.S. Steel, for the flogging of a white college professor, Joe Gelders. They regarded him as too friendly toward blacks. I have those hearings.

Thanks for the column.

Best wishes,

Harold

Harold Weisberg

King and JFK assassination records appeals
SA names withheld
under (b)(1) and (7) claims

Harold Weisberg 7/28/80

There came a time when you phoned to discuss the name of an SA you said you were satisfied should be withheld. It was, you said, an exceptional case. Before you could finish I said that had to be the Tampa matter, that while I was entirely without sympathy for the SA who would do such a thing or be part of it, I did have concerns for his family.

This evil thing, for your information, was the Lab's taking a batch of the FBI's tapes of Dr. King and from then creating a single tape that was sent to his wife, with a letter suggesting that only suicide remained for him.

I've often wondered how I knew that of all places this Washington FBI concoction had been mailed from Tampa.

Now I know: it was disclosed, along with the SA's name, Lish Whitson.

If you ever want the name of the SA in the Lab who created this tape by careful selections from other tapes, that, too, has been disclosed and I can provide it.

At no time and in no factual way has the FBI disputed my representation that the extensive disclosures of FBI names did not lead to harassment and that the real reasons are Cointelproing requestors, intimidating the courts, and trying to avoid embarrassment to the FBI.

If there is any one matter over which harassment might be expected it is over this FBI attempt to drive King to suicide and at least ruin his marriage. Now that I can inform you that the names are disclosed, I ask you to show that there was harassment.

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~

E. Early 1965

On January 5, 1965, Atlanta advised Headquarters that King was becoming more and more upset, that he blamed the FBI and felt his phone was tapped. On the same day a report was made on the previously ordered review of King's writings and books in an effort to detect possible communist influence. The conclusion was that there were certain parallels but no casual link. On January 6, New York was directed to discreetly cover King in New York by physical and electronic surveillance because he might meet a woman there. The memo indicated, "security is paramount". Also on the sixth the SAC in Atlanta called the Bureau and reported that the wiretaps indicated that King was very nervous and upset and was not sleeping well. He believed the Bureau had his phone tapped. King said a tape and letter which referred to the . . . . . (b)(7)(C) . . . . . had been sent to his home and his wife had read the letter. King said: "They are out to break me". The SAC knew nothing of the tape. King said in a tapped conversation that he needed to talk with Hoover or DeLoach. (u)

The so-called (b)(7)(C) . . . . had actually been mailed in late November 1964 by Lish Whitson, a former agent who flew to Florida at Sullivan's instructions. Sullivan had previously told [. . . (b)(7)(C). . . . .] to keep the microphone tapes together. Phillips was told to give some of the tapes to John Matter of the lab. He now thinks he . . . . . (b)(7)(C) . . . . . When Matter returned the tapes, there was a composite added. Sullivan had [(b)(7)(C)] get him non-watermarked stationery. Sullivan took the tapes and the stationery and later gave [(b)(7)(C)] a package to deliver to Whitson. The tape was accompanied by a letter advising King that . . . . . (b)(7)(C) . . . . . Apparently King did not listen to the tape until he returned from Oslo. His wife is supposed to have listened to it also. (u)

UNCLASSIFIED

Murphy Report (CRD) 3/31/76

KING,

[redacted] I will not dignify your name with either a Mr. or a Reverend or a Dr. And, your last name calls to mind only the type of King such as King Henry the VIII [redacted]

King, look into your heart. You know you are a complete fraud and a great liability to all of us Negroes. White people in this country have enough frauds of their own but I am sure they don't have one at this time that is any where near your equal. You are no clergyman and you know it. I repeat you are a colossal fraud and an evil, vicious one at that. You could not believe in God [redacted] Clearly you don't believe in any personal moral principles.

King, like all frauds your end is approaching. You could have been our greatest leader. You, even at an early age have turned out to be not a leader but a dissolute, abnormal moral imbecile. We will now have to depend on our older leaders like Wilkins a man of character and thank God we have others like him. But you are done. Your "honorary" degrees, your Nobel Prize (what a grim farce) and other awards will not save you. King, I repeat you are done.

No person can overcome facts, not even a fraud like yourself, [redacted] I repeat - no person can argue successfully against facts. You are finished. [redacted] And some of them to pretend to be ministers of the Gospel. Satan could not do more. What incredible evilness. [redacted] King you are done.

The American public, the church organizations that have been helping - Protestant, Catholic and Jews will know you for what you are - an evil, abnormal beast. So will others who have backed you. You are done.

King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is. You have just 34 days in which to do (this exact number has been selected for a specific reason, it has definite practical significant. You are done. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation.